

NOVEMBER 1, 1981
A Guide to the
Food Program Cuts

NEW JERSEY ALERT

Supplemental Appropriation Bill S.2487 to Restore State School Lunch Funds

IMMEDIATE ACTION NEEDED

A Supplemental Appropriation Bill to restore \$1.7 million in state aid cut from New Jersey's School Lunch Program was introduced to the Senate Revenue, Finance, and Appropriations Committee yesterday. Passage of the bill S.2487 will bring the state's contribution to the School Lunch Program back up to the full \$10.7 million recommended by the Appropriations Committee last June. The \$1.7 million cut by the Governor at that time was placed in a surplus account pending analysis of the impact of federal cuts on school nutrition programs. It is now evident that the Governor's action has only exacerbated the severe financial burden thrust upon local programs by massive federal cuts.

Throughout New Jersey, school boards have been forced to institute substantial increases in school lunch prices to compensate for the drastic loss of federal and state funds. In most schools reduced-price meals have doubled from last year's 30¢ to the current federal maximum of 40¢. Students receiving "paid" meals are in some cases bearing costs of over \$1.00 in comparison to last year's average price of 61¢. Statewide participation has dropped 25-50%, as prohibitive prices force children to seek an alternative meal or simply go without lunch. The reduced participation of these students limits the revenue needed to maintain quality meals for all children remaining on the program.

School lunch managers have been facing the dilemma of compromising the nutritional quality of the program in order to meet food and labor costs. This action undermines the integrity of the program which is authorized to protect the nutritional well-being of the nation's children. In some districts menu changes and employee lay-offs have already occurred.

The combined loss of federal and state funds amounts to over \$21 million, or a 20% budget cut for the New Jersey School Lunch Program. Although the Senate has been slow on the federal level for this school year, IT IS NOT TOO LATE for the state to reaffirm its original commitment to the School Lunch Program by restoring the \$1.7 million. This money is available for the program and will not require increased taxes or complicated legislative changes.

All state representatives should be alerted IMMEDIATELY to the Supplemental Appropriation Bill, S.2487 and its modifications for the thousands of New Jersey schoolchildren who depend on the School Lunch Program for good nutrition. All food program supporters should express their views on this crucial issue in personal visits, telephone calls and letters to their state legislators. (Note: Current members of the State Senate and Assembly should be contacted, not new representatives elected November 3).

For further information on the Supplemental Appropriation Bill, or if you are unsure of how to contact your state legislator, call Denise Cohen or Alan Sanders at the National Civil Liberties Project, (202) 844-1361.

Impact of the Federal Budget Cuts on New Jersey's School Lunch Program

	1980 Participation	Expected Total Federal Reimbursements Sept. 1981 Prior to Cuts	Total Federal Reimbursements Sept. 1981 After Cuts	Federal Reimbursements Lost
Paid	309,709	121,791,881	117,769,398	\$14,882,583
Reduced-Price	48,483	4,943,726	3,170,592	1,783,134
Free	242,252	42,791,673	38,687,602	\$4,104,071
		\$69,527,280	\$59,527,602	\$10,000,000

NOTE: The financial impact of the federal cuts do not account for a loss of funds that will result when both paid and reduced-price students drop out of the program due to higher prices. There will be an additional loss due to the change in income eligibility for free and reduced-price meals.

ANSWERING DIFFICULT QUESTIONS
ON THE SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATION BILL

For a successful effort, we must be equipped to handle any and all pertinent questions that can be expected to emerge from this issue. We have prepared the following questions and responses that will help us in presentation to our Legislators. If you are aware of any other difficult questions that you have faced in the past and successful strategies for dealing with them, please share them with us.

1. **Question:** The loss in state funds, when broken down, amounts to only 1.7 cents per lunch. Can't a school get by without this small amount of assistance?

Response: This 1.7 cent cut could mean someone's job. For example, in a school serving 1,000 lunches each day, 1.7 cents per meal translates to over \$6,000 for the 180 day school year. As labor cutbacks in some lunch programs have already occurred, it is clear that a Supplemental Appropriation could put people back to work. Though it appears to be just pennies, this cut in state funds is actually a great loss for individual programs.

2. **Question:** The state portion of school lunch funding goes to support free, reduced-price and paid meals. Why should the state provide additional funds for the lunches of the paying children?

Response: First of all, the National School Lunch Program is meant to provide good nutrition for all children, regardless of family income. Providing financial support for all meals is good business sense. We have seen the price of paid meals skyrocket up 50, and even, one dollar, leaving the paying children to turn away from the program. Without the cash revenue that the paying children provide to the program, the likelihood of program shut-down increases. The state should provide assistance for all meals to ensure the participation of all students, thereby sustaining a program's financial survival.

3. **Question:** Less funding from the state will force school lunch managers to be more objective and to economize. With all the food that is wasted in lunchrooms, shouldn't we be encouraging savings rather than padding the school lunch budget?

Response: Cutting back funds is no way to save creativity. The outcome of this \$3.5 million loss will be a lower quality lunch, especially in smaller districts, as school lunch managers will not have the financial flexibility to be creative and prepare a more nutritious, palatable meal. Yes, plate waste is a problem, but it will only be exacerbated when schools are forced to strip on food costs, resulting in a less desirable lunch.

Attention . . .

A SECOND SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATION BILL WAS INTRODUCED IN THE ASSEMBLY OF JUNE 14, 1988. THIS BILL, A-3840 REQUESTS A SUPPLEMENTAL APPROPRIATION OF \$1.5 MILLION FOR NEW JERSEY'S SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM.

PLEASE ALERT BOTH SENATORS AND ASSEMBLYMEN TO S-3487 AND A-3840.

New Jersey State is affiliated with the National Child Nutrition Project, an federal agency headquartered in New Jersey 08901. The National Child Nutrition Project is a non-profit organization which seeks to improve and expand school lunch program operations. Publication of New Jersey State is supported by a Community Food and Nutrition Program grant from the Community Service Administration, Region II.

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